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Postmodernism and 'The Other Side'

The success of the term postmodernism—its currency and varied use within a range of critical and descriptive discourses both within the academy and outside in the broader streams of "informed" cultural commentary—has generated its own problems. It becomes more and more difficult as the 80's wear on to specify exactly what it is that "postmodernism" is supposed to refer to as the term gets stretched in all directions across different debates, different disciplinary and discursive boundaries, as different factions seek to make it their own, using it to designate a plethora of incommensurable objects, tendencies, emergencies. When it becomes possible for people to describe as "postmodern" the decor of a room, the design of a building, the diegesis of a film, the construction of a record, or a "scratch" video, a TV commercial, or an arts documentary, or the "intertextual" relations between them, the layout of a page in a fashion magazine or critical journal, an anti-teleological tendency within epistemology, the attack on the "metaphysics of presence," a general attenuation of feeling, the collective chagrin and morbid projections of a post-War generation of Baby Boomers confronting disillusioned middle age, the "predicament" of reflexivity, a group of rhetorical tropes, a proliferation of surfaces, a new phase in commodity fetishism, a fascination for "images," codes and styles, a process of cultural, political or existential fragmentation and/or crisis, the "de-centring" of the subject, an "incredulity towards metanarratives," the replacement of unitary power axes by a pluralism of power/discourse formations, the "implosion of meaning," the collapse of cultural hierarchies, the dread engendered by the threat of nuclear self-destruction, the decline of the University, the functioning and effects of the new miniaturised technologies, broad societal and economic shifts into a "media," "consumer" or "multinational" phase, a sense (depending on whom you read) of "placelessness" or the abandonment of placelessness ("critical regionalism") or (even) a generalised substitution of spatial for temporal co-ordinates—when it becomes possible to describe all those things as "postmodern" (or more simply, using a current abbreviation, as "post" or "very post") then it's clear we are in the presence of a buzzword.

This is not to claim that because it is being used to designate so much the term is meaningless (though there is a danger that the kind of blurring of categories, objects, levels which goes on within certain kinds of "postmodernist" writing will be used to licence a lot of lazy thinking: many of the (contentious) orientations and assertions of the post are already becoming submerged as unexplicated, taken for granted "truths" in some branches of contemporary critique). Rather I would prefer to believe, as Raymond Williams indicates in *Keywords*, that the more complexly and contradictorily nuanced a word is, the

more likely it is to have formed the focus for historically significant debates, to have occupied a semantic ground in which something precious and important was felt to be embedded. I take then, as my (possibly ingenuous) starting point that the degree of semantic complexity and overload surrounding the term "postmodernism" at the moment signals that a significant number of people with conflicting interests and opinions feel that there is something sufficiently important at stake here to be worth struggling and arguing over.

I want to use this opportunity to try to do two things, both of which will incidentally involve reflections on and responses to the interview with Stuart Hall but neither of which engage directly with the substance of what Stuart had to say. First I shall attempt to summarise in a quite schematic way some of the themes, questions and issues that gather round this term. This attempt at clarification will involve a trek across territory already familiar to many of the readers of this journal. It will also entail my going against the spirit of postmodernism (which tends to favour what Paul Virilio calls "the art of the fragment") and attempting some kind of interpretive and historical overview. However, I think it's worth trying because it may help to ground what is, after all, a notoriously vertiginous concept and to offer an opening onto the debates in Europe and the States between marxism and postmodernism and more specifically between postmodernism and British cultural studies which I think frame much of what Stuart Hall had to say in the interview. I make no claims for the authority of what I have to say: the tone here will be credulous but critical. I shall merely be taking one man's route, as it were, through or round the post. Secondly, resorting to what I hope is a more constructive or at least more positive register, I shall seek to specify exactly what it is that I feel is at stake in these debates and to offer a few suggestions about the lessons I've learned from living through them.

Staking Out The Posts

To say "post" is to say "past"—hence questions of periodisation are inevitably raised. There is however little agreement as to what it is we are alleged to have surpassed, when that passage is supposed to have occurred and what effects it is supposed to have had (see, for example, Perry Anderson's (1986) closely argued objections to Marshall Berman's (1982) (extremely loose and imprecise) periodisation of modernisation/modernism in *All That's Solid Melts into Air*). Michael Newman (1986) further problematises the apparently superseded term in postmodernism by pointing out that there are at least two artistic modernisms articulating different politico-aesthetic aspirations which remain broadly incompatible and non-synchronous. The first, which is ultimately derived from Kant, seeks to establish the absolute autonomy of art and finds its most extreme and dictatorial apologist in Clement Greenberg, the American critic who sought to "purify" art of all "non-essentials" by championing the cause of abstract expressionism—the style of painting most strictly confined to an exploration of the materials and two dimensionality of paint on canvas. The second modernist tradition which Newman (1986) traces back to Hegel aspires to the heteronomous dissolution of art into life/political practice and leads through the surrealists, the constructivists, the futurists, etc., to performance artists and the conceptualists of the 1970's.

If the unity, the boundaries and the timing of modernism itself remain contentious issues, then *postmodernism* seems to defy any kind of critical consensus. Not only do different writers define it differently, but a single writer can talk at different times about different "posts." Thus Jean-Francois Lyotard (1986a) has recently used the term postmodernism to refer to three separate tendencies: (i) a trend within architecture away from the Modern Movement's project "of a last rebuilding of the whole space occupied by humanity," (ii) a

decay in confidence in the idea of progress and modernisation ("there is a sort of sorrow in the Zeitgeist") and (iii) a recognition that it is no longer appropriate to employ the metaphor of the "avant garde" as if modern artists were soldiers fighting on the borders of knowledge and the visible, prefiguring in their art some kind of collective global future. J.G. Merquior (1986) (in a hostile critique of what he calls the "postmodern ideology") offers a different triptych: (i) a style or mood of exhaustion of/ dissatisfaction with modernism in art and literature, (ii) a trend in poststructuralist philosophy and (iii) a new cultural age in the West.

Furthermore the Post is differently inflected in different national contexts. It was, for instance, notable that *The Anti-Aesthetic* in the edition available in the United States arrived on the shelves beneath a suitably austere, baleful and more or less abstract (modernist?) lilac and black cover which echoed the Nietzschean tone of the title. However, when the same book was published in Britain it appeared as *Post Modern Culture* with a yellow cover consisting of a photograph of a postmodernist "installation" incorporating cameras, speakers etc., complete with comic book sound and light rays. The "translation" of postmodernism as a set of discourses addressed in America to a demographically dispersed, university and gallery centred constituency for a similar though perhaps slightly more diverse, more geographically concentrated readership in Britain (where cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, the appeal or otherwise of "Americana," the flattening out of aesthetic and moral standards, etc., are still "hot" issues and where there is still—despite all the factional disputes and fragmentations of the last 20 years—a sizeable, organised marxist Left) involved the negotiation of different cultural-semantic background expectancies.

National differences were further highlighted during the weekend symposium at the London I.C.A. (Institute of Contemporary Arts) in 1985 when native speakers giving papers which stressed the enabling potentialities of the new "user friendly" communication technologies and the gradual deregulation of the airwaves, and which celebrated popular culture-as-postmodern-bricolage-and-play were confronted with the Gallic anti-populism of Lyotard who declared a marked preference for the fine arts, idealist aesthetics and the European avant garde tradition, and demonstrated in comments made in response to the papers in the session on Popular Culture and Postmodernism a deep, abiding suspicion for the blandishments and commodified simplicities of "mass culture" (Lyotard, 1986c).

To introduce a further nexus of distinctions, Hal Foster (1983) in his Preface to *The Anti-Aesthetic* distinguishes between neo-conservative, anti-modernist and critical postmodernisms and points out that whereas some critics and practitioners seek to extend and revitalise the modernist project(s), others condemn modernist objectives and set out to remedy the imputed effects of modernism on family life, moral values, etc., whilst still others working in a spirit of ludic and/or critical pluralism endeavour to open up new discursive spaces and subject positions outside the confines of established practices, the art market and the modernist orthodoxy. In this latter "critical" alternative (the one favoured by Foster) postmodernism is defined as a positive critical advance which fractures through negation (i) the petrified hegemony of an earlier corpus of "radical aesthetic" strategies and proscriptions, and/or (ii) the pre-Freudian unitary subject which formed the hub of the "progressive" wheel of modernisation and which functioned in the modern period as the regulated focus for a range of scientific, literary, legal, medical and bureaucratic discourses. In this positive "anti-aesthetic," the critical postmodernists are said to challenge the validity of the kind of global, unilinear version of artistic and economic-technological development which a term like modernism implies and to concentrate instead on what gets left out, marginalised, repressed or buried underneath that term. The selective tradition is here seen in

terms of exclusion and violence. As an initial counter move, modernism is discarded by some critical postmodernists as a Eurocentric and phallogentric category which involves a systematic preference for certain forms and voices over others. What is recommended in its place is an inversion of the modernist hierarchy—a hierarchy which, since its inception in the 18th, 19th or early 20th centuries (depending on your periodisation) consistently places the metropolitan centre over the "underdeveloped" periphery, Western art forms over Third World ones, men's art over women's art or, alternatively, in less anatomical terms "masculine" or "masculinist" forms, institutions and practices over "feminine," "feminist" or "femineist" ones. Here the word "postmodernism" is used to cover all those strategies which set out to dismantle the power of the white, male author as privileged source of meaning and value.

The Three Negations

I shall return later to some of the substantive issues addressed by "critical postmodernism" but for the moment I should like to dwell on the constitutive role played here, indeed throughout the Post, by negation. In fact, it is a crucial one, for postmodernism as a discourse or compound of discourses is rather like Saussure's paradigm of language, in that it's a system with no positive terms. In fact, we could say it's a system predicated, as Saussure's was, on the categorical denial of the possibility of positive entities per se. (See for instance, Lyotard's bracketing off, de-construction, de-molition of the concept of "matter" in the catalogue notes for the "Les Immatériaux" exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in 1984. More recently, Lyotard (1986b) has argued against the "vulgar materialist" line that matter can be grasped as substance. Instead he suggests that matter should be understood as a "series of ungraspable elements organised by abstract structures" (p. 10)). However, a kind of rudimentary coherence begins to emerge around the question of what postmodernism negates. There are, I think, three closely linked negations which bind the compound of postmodernism together and thereby serve to distinguish it in an approximate sort of way from other adjacent "isms" (though the links between post-structuralism and postmodernism are in places so tight that absolute distinctions become difficult if not impossible). These founding negations, all of which involve—incidentally or otherwise—an attack on marxism as a total explanatory system, can be traced back to two sources: on the one hand, historically to the blocked hopes and frustrated rhetoric of the late 60's and the student revolts (what a friend once described to me as the "repressed trauma of 1968"), and on the other, through the philosophical tradition to Nietzsche:

1. Against Totalisation

An antagonism to the "generalising" aspirations of all those pre-Post-erous discourses which are associated with either the Enlightenment or the Western philosophical tradition—those discourses which set out to address a transcendental Subject, to define an essential human nature, to prescribe a global human destiny or to proscribe collective human goals. This abandonment of the universalist claims underwriting all previous (legitimate) forms of authority in the West involves more specifically a rejection of Hegelianism, marxism, any philosophy of history (more "developed" or "linear" than, say, Nietzsche's doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence) and tends (incidentally?) towards the abandonment of all "sociological" concepts, categories, modes of enquiry and methods, etc. Sociology is condemned either in its positivist guises (after Adorno, Marcuse, etc.) as a manifestation of instrumental-bureaucratic rationality, or more totally (after Foucault) as a form of surveillance/ control always-already complicit with existing power relations. In the latter case, no real distinctions are made between

positivist/non-positivist; qualitative/quantitative; marxist/pluralist/interpretive/functionalist, etc. sociologies: all are seen as strategies embedded in institutions themselves irrefragably implicated in and productive of particular configurations of power and knowledge. In place of the totalising intellectual Foucault offers us the intellectual-as-partisan: producer of "socio-fictions" which despite their equivocal truth status may have "reality-effects," and the intellectual-as-facilitator-and-self-conscious-strategist (Foucault's work with prisoners' rights groups is often cited as exemplary here). All larger validity claims are regarded with suspicion. Beneath the euphemistic masks of, for instance, "disinterested Reason," "scientific marxism," "objective" statistics, "neutral" description, "sympathetic" ethnography or "reflexive" ethnomethodology, the Eye of the Post is likely to discern the same essential "Bestiary of Powers" (see especially, Jean Baudrillard (1983a) and Paul Virilio (1983) for explicit denunciations of "sociology"). There is an especially marked antipathy to sociological abstractions like "society," "class," "mass," etc. (see Lyotard (1986b)). The move against universalist or value-free knowledge claims gathers momentum in the 60's with the growth of phenomenology but reaches its apogee in the late 60's and 70's under pressure from "external" demands mediated through social and political movements, rather than from epistemological debates narrowly defined within the academy, i.e., in the late 60's the challenge comes from the acid perspectivism of the drug culture, from the post 68 politics of subjectivity and utterance (psychoanalysis, post-structuralism) and from the fusion of the personal and the political in feminism, etc.

In Europe, the retreat from the first person plural "We"—the characteristic mode of address of the Voice of Liberation during the heroic age of the great bourgeois revolutions—can be associated historically with the fragmentation of the radical "centre" after 1968 (though the process of disenchantment begins in earnest after World War 2 with the revelation of the Moscow Trials, and after 1956 with the invasion of Hungary and the formation of the New Left). At the same time, during the 50's attempts had been made most notably by Sartre to rescue a viable marxism and to rectify the over general conception of epochal change which marks the Hegelian philosophy of history. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty sought to relate dialectical materialism, as Peters Dews (1986) has recently put it, to "its smallest, most phenomenologically translucent component, the praxis of the human individual" (p. 14). However these anti-generalist tendencies are most clearly enunciated in the late 60's with the widespread disaffection of the students from the French communist party and the odour of betrayal that hung over the party after the events of 68; with the appearance of publications like Castoriadis's *History as Creation*, and with the fully fledged revival of interest—assuming the proportions of a cult in the 70's and early 80's—in the work of Nietzsche—a revival which can be traced back to the "rediscovery" of Nietzsche in the late 50's by the generation of intellectuals which included Foucault (1971) and Deleuze (1983) but which did not really take off until the post 68 period of disenchantment. From 68 we can date the widespread jettisoning of the belief amongst educated, "radical" factions, not only in marxist-leninism but in any kind of power structure administered from a bureaucratically organised centre, and the suspicion of any kind of political programme formulated by an elite and disseminated through a hierarchical chain of command. This process of fragmentation and growing sensitivity to the micro-relations of power both facilitated and was facilitated by the articulation of new radical or revolutionary demands, and the formation of new collectivities, new subjectivities which could not be contained within the old paradigms, and which could be neither addressed by nor "spoken" in the old critical, descriptive and expressive languages.

Feminism, molecular and micro politics, the autonomy movement, the counterculture, the politics of sexuality, the politics of utterance (who says what how to whom on whose behalf: the issue of the politics of power and discourse, the issue of discursive "space")—all these "movements" and "tendencies" grew out of the cracks, the gaps and silences in the old "radical" articulations. Given their provenance on the "other side," as it were of the enonce it is hardly surprising that the new politics was more or less centrally concerned with the issue of subjectivity itself.

All these fractures and the new forms which grew inside them can be understood in this context as responses to the "crisis of representation" where the term "representation"—understood both in its everyday sense of "political representation" and in the structuralist sense of a distortive "ideological" representation of a pre-existent real—is regarded as problematic. From this point on, all forms and processes of "representation" are suspect. As the films of Jean-Luc Godard set out to demonstrate, no image or utterance, from political speeches to narrative films to news broadcasts to advertisements and the inert, reified images of women in pornography was to be regarded as innocent ("In every image we must ask who speaks" [Godard]). All such representations were more or less complicit with, more or less oppositional to the "dominant ideology." At the same time, the self congratulatory rhetoric of political representation as a guarantor of individual and collective freedoms managed through the orderly routines and institutions of Parliamentary democracy was rejected as a sham. This of course was nothing new: such an orientation forms the basis of a much older oppositional consensus. But more than that, for the disaffected factions who lived through the events of May 68 the idea of an individual or a political party representing, speaking for a social group, a class, a gender, a society, a collectivity let alone for some general notion of History or Progress was untenable. (What "he" could ever speak adequately for "her," could recognise "her" needs, could represent "her" interests?) What tended to happen after 68 is that these two senses of the term "representation" were run together around and through the notion of discourse and language as *in themselves* productive of social relations, social and sexual inequalities, through the operations of identification, differentiation and subject positioning. In the closely related interrogation of and assault upon the idea of the (unitary) subject a similar ambiguity was there to be exploited: subject as in classical rhetoric and grammar, the subject of the sentence, the "I" as in "I did it my way," "I changed the world," etc., the mythical "I" implying as it does the self-conscious, self-present Cartesian subject capable of intentional, transparent communication and unmediated action on the world. On the other hand, there is the "subjected subject": "subject" as in subject to the crown, subjugated, owned by some Higher Power. In the gap between these two meanings we became subjects of ideology, subject to the Law of the Father in the Althusserian and Lacanian senses respectively: apparently free agents and yet at the same time subject to an authority which was at once symbolic and imaginary—not "really" there but thoroughly real in its effects. The project of freeing the subject from subjection to the Subject was interpreted after 68 by a growing and increasingly influential intellectual contingent as being most effectively accomplished through the deflection of critical and activist energies away from abstractions like the State-as-source-and-repository-of-all-oppressive-powers towards particular, localised struggles and by directing attention to the play of power on the ground as it were in particular discursive formations.

But Paris represents just one 68. There were others, the 68, for instance, of Woodstock and the West Coast, of Haight-Ashbury, the Pranksters, the hippies,

the Yippies, the Weathermen, the Panthers and the opposition to the war in Vietnam. The lunar desertscapes and dune buggies of Manson and the Angels: the space of acid: the libertarian imaginary of unlimited social and sexual licence, of unlimited existential risking. Here too the rights of pleasure, the play of desire and the silent "discourse of the body" were being asserted against the puritanism and logocentrism of an earlier "straighter" set of "radical" demands and aspirations. In different ways in Paris and in San Francisco in the wake of two quite different 68's, the assertion of the claims of the particular against the general, the fragment against the (irrecoverable) whole was to lead to the apotheosis of the schizophrenic as it did more or less contemporaneously in London in the work of R.D. Laing (1967) and David Cooper (1971). Whilst in Paris, Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari excavated and redeemed the buried, repressed and forbidden discourses of the mad and the marginal (Bataille, Artaud, Pierre Riviere), young men and women stalked around cities as far apart as Los Angeles and Liverpool wearing t-shirts decorated with a screen printed photograph of Charles Manson staring crazed and blazing eyed out into the world at chest level. The failed apocalyptic aspirations of 68 and the cult of the psychotic are both deeply registered in the rhetoric and style of postmodernist critique and leave as their legacy a set of priorities and interests which functions as a hidden agenda inside the Post (see 2 below).

To end this section on a footnote, it is perhaps surprising, given the anti-generalist bias which informs and directs the manifold vectors of the Post, that thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Frederic Jameson should retain such a panoptic focus in their work, writing often at an extremely high level of abstraction and generality of a "post modern condition," or "predicament," a "dominant cultural norm," etc.

2. Against Teleology

A skepticism regarding the idea of decidable origins/causes; this anti-teleological tendency is sometimes invoked explicitly against the precepts of historical materialism: "mode of production," "determination," etc. The doctrine of productive causality is here replaced by less mechanical, less unidirectional and expository accounts of process and transformation such as those available within the epistemological framework provided by, for instance, "catastrophe theory"—to take one frequently cited example. In the same kind of knight's move which marked the growth of systems theory in the fifties, arguments and paradigms from the "hard" sciences, from post-Newtonian physics, relativity, bio-chemistry, genetics, etc. are transposed to the broad field of "communications" where they function as metaphors (principally, perhaps, they work—as such transpositions of scientific terms worked within modernism, for instance in futurism and cubism—as metaphors of modernity itself, as signs of the New). The anti-teleological tendency is potentially there in the Saussurean insistence on the arbitrary nature of the sign. It "comes out" explicitly in the post-structuralist elevation of the signifier/ withering away of the signified and is most pronounced in Baudrillard's order of the simulacra where in a parodic inversion of historical materialism the model precedes and generates the real-seeming (which in the age of miniaturised communications is all that's left of the "real"), where use value is completely absorbed into exchange value (in the form of sign-exchange value), where the old base-superstructure analogy is turned upside down so that value is seen to be generated in the production and exchange of insubstantials (information, image, "communications," in speculation on, for example, the currency and commodity future markets) rather than from the expropriation of "surplus value" through the direct exploitation of an industrial proletariat employed to produce three dimensional goods in factories. (At this point

Baudrillard's characterisation of a world given over to the production of irreal or "hyperreal" simulacra derives a specious quasi-empirical grounding from the work of those "post-industrialists" (Alain Touraine, Daniel Bell, Andre Gersz, Alvin Toffler) who concentrate on the impact in the overdeveloped world of the new communications technologies on labour power, the relations between and composition of the classes, industrial patterns of work, consumption, culture, models of subjectivity, etc.)

The rhetorical tropes which form the literary-artistic-critical means for effacing the traces of teleology are parody, simulation, pastiche and allegory (Newman, 1986). All these tropes tend to deny the primacy or originary power of the "author" as sole source of meaning, remove the injunction placed upon the (romantic) artist to create substance out of nothing (i.e., to "invent," be "original") and confine the critic/artist instead to an endless "reworking of the antecedent" in such a way that the purity of the text gives way to the promiscuity of the inter-text and the distinction between originals and copies, hosts and parasites, "creative" texts and "critical" ones is eroded (i.e., with the development of meta-fiction and paracriticism). In parody, pastiche, allegory and simulation what tends to get celebrated is the *accretion* of texts and meanings, the *proliferation* of sources and readings rather than the isolation, and deconstruction of the single text or utterance. None of these favoured tropes (parody, etc.) offer the artist a way of speaking from an "authentic" (that is [after Barthes, Derrida and Foucault] imaginary) point of pure presence (romanticism). Nor do they offer the critic a way of uncovering the "real" (intended) meaning or meanings buried in a text or a "phenomenon" (hermeneutics).

In Jameson's autopsy, the idea of depthlessness as a marker of postmodernism accompanied as it is by a rejection of the vocabulary of intellectual "penetration" and the binary structures on which post Socratic thought is reckoned to be based (e.g., reality v. appearance, real relations v. phenomenal forms, science v. false consciousness, consciousness v. the unconscious, inside v. outside, subject v. object, etc.) can be understood in this context as another step away from the old explanatory models and certainties. Derridean deconstruction and grammatology further destabilise such dualistic structures by disrupting the illusion of priority which tends to collect around one term in any binary opposition through the prepositional links which bind antinomies together (e.g., *behind* consciousness, the primary unconscious; *underneath* illusory phenomenal forms, the real relations; *beyond* subjective distortions, a world of stable objects, etc.). If the "depth model" disappears, then so, too, does the intellectual as seer, the intellectual as informed but dispassionate observer/custodian of a "field of enquiry" armed with "penetrating insights" and "authoritative overviews," enemy of sophistry, artifice and superficial detail. Once such oppositions dissolve a lot of other things go too: there can be no more rectification of popular errors, no more trawling for hidden truths, no more going behind appearances or "against the grain" of the visible and the obvious. (The anti-positivist, anti-empiricist impetus that animated critical (rather than Greenbergian) modernism is, in other words, no longer available as a viable option). In short, no more (Book of) Revelations. Instead what is left, to use another postmodernist key word, is a "fascination" with mirrors, icons, surfaces. In those accounts of postmodernism produced by writers who retain a problematic, residual commitment to marxian frames of reference, this ending of critical distance and the depth model is seen to be tied to (though not, presumably, determined by) a larger historical shift into a "post-industrial," "consumer," "media," "multi-national" or "monopoly" phase in the development of capitalism. After the prohibitions, the instrumental rationality, and the

purposiveness of a production economy (and the complementary "oppositions" and "interruptions" of modernism), we get—or so the argument goes—the licenced promiscuity, the unconstrained imaginaries, the merger of subjects and objects, mainstreams and margins, the drift and the dreamwork which characterise life in the consumption economy of the Post. In an economy geared towards the spinning of endlessly accelerating spirals of desire, consumption allegedly imposes its own "ecstatic" or pluralist (dis)order (Jameson's "heterogeneity without norms"). Idolatry, the worship of Baal (commodity fetishism) replaces positivism and its doppelganger, Marxism, the dominant epistemic faiths of the modern period. Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* collapses as the combatative strategies of modernism—negation, estrangement, "non-identity thinking"—which were supposed to work to reveal the arbitrariness/mutability of symbolic-social orders and to form the last line of defence for the "authentic" and "autonomous" values of a kingdom yet to come—are either rendered invalid (obsolete: no longer offering a purchase on the contemporary condition) or are absorbed as just another set of options on a horizontal plane of meaning and value where either everything means everything else (post-structuralist polysemy) or alternatively—what amounts to the same thing—everything means nothing whatsoever (Baudrillard's "implosion of meaning"). Ultimately these two options achieve the same effect: the evacuation of an axis of power external to discourse itself: end of "ideology," the cutting edge of marxist critical practice...

From such a set of premises it is no longer possible to speak of our collective "alienation" from some imagined (lost or ideal) "species being." Without the gaps between, say, perception, experience, articulation and the real opened up by the modernist master categories of ideology and alienation, there is no space left to struggle over, to struggle from (or as we shall see below, to struggle towards). Both the cartesian subject, capable of moral and aesthetic judgement and the routine discrimination of truth from lies, reality from fiction, and the Enlightenment subject, child of the great modern abstractions: Liberty, Equality, Progress, Fraternity, etc.: these creatures disappear (their phantasmagoric essence finally exposed) in what Lyotard dubs the post modern "sensorium": a new mode of being in the world constituted in part directly through exposure to the new technologies which through the computational simulation of mental, linguistic, and corporeal operations work to efface the line between mind and matter, subject and object (e.g., "cerebration" occurs at the "interface" between, say, two computational systems (one warmblooded, the other electronic) and is no longer adequately conceptualised as a purely "internal" process).

In a different, though related, Lacanian declension of the post, desire (which replaces Reason or the Class Struggle as the historical constant, the motor of history) reinforces the Law propelling the subject which is constituted out of a series of partitions on a doomed quest for completion and the final satisfaction of the very Lack, the recognition of which through the Oedipus Complex marked the "origin" of the subject qua subject in the first place (i.e., because the Oedipus Complex marks the entry into language/the Symbolic and the Symbolic already "owns" the discursive positions which the subject now exists to occupy). Within the Lacanian scenario, that quest for completion and satisfaction is doomed because desire is nothing more than the insatiable other side of lack, and lack itself is recto to the verso of the Law. It is doubly doomed because the questing subject is itself literally nothing if not incomplete ("I think where I am not and I am not where I think" [Lacan]). It is triply doomed because this fragmented subject is an ontological "fact" only in so far as it "finds" itself (i.e., gets positioned) in language and the Symbolic which is the domain of the Law which,

to complete the circle, the movement of desire can only confirm and trace out rather than contradict or overthrow, etc. Once sutured into the Jamesonian critique of consumer culture (where the "death of the subject" is seen as an historic "event" rather than [as from the post-structuralist perspective] as a philosophically demonstrable case valid at all times in all places), the Lacanian model of subjectivity and desire tends to consolidate the anti-utopianism which forms the last of the major postmodernist negations (see below 3), though Lacanian feminists and critical postmodernists stress the extent to which a new political front is opened up within discourse (signifying practice) itself. At this point, through a series of post-structuralist slippages and puns a kind of total "closure of discourse" (Marcuse) tends to occur so that we are denied the prospect of any kind of "elsewhere," any kind of "alternative" let alone transcendence through struggle or any prospect—imminent or otherwise—of the removal of "scarcity" through the rational deployment of global resources. At one level, what are presented in the marxist discourse as "contradictions" which are historical (hence ultimately soluble) get transmuted in the discourse(s) of the Post into paradoxes which are eternal (hence insoluble). Thus "desire" supercedes "need," "lack" problematises the calculus of "scarcity," etc. The implication is that there is nowhere left outside the ceaseless (mindless) spirals of desire, no significant conflict beyond the tension (resorting here to the very different terms and emphases of Foucault) between bodies and those constraints which shape and cut against (de-fine) them as *social* bodies. Agon—the timeless (Hellenic) contest between evenly matched combatants where there can be no final victory, no irreversible outcome here replaces History—the grand (Hebraic) narrative of the struggles of the righteous against the forces of evil—a narrative composed of a succession of unique, unrepeatable moments unfolding in a linear sequence towards the final day of judgement (Armageddon, the Apocalypse, Socialism: end of class struggle).

According to one strand within the postmodernist account, the implication here is that without meaningful duration and the subjective dispositions, expectancies, and orientations, which such a "sense of an (imminent, just and proper) ending" surreptitiously imposes on us all, psychosis begins to replace neurosis as the dominant psychic norm under late Capitalism. For Baudrillard (1983c) there is the autistic "ecstasy of communication" where judgement, meaning, action are impossible, where the psychic "scene" (space of the subject/stage for psychic "dramas" complete with "characters" equipped with conscious and unconscious intentions, drives, motivations, "conflicts," etc.) is replaced by an "obscene" and arbitrary coupling of disparate "screens" and "termini" where bits of information, images, televisual close ups of nothing in particular float about in the "hyperreal" space of the image-bloated simulacrum: a Leviathan like lattice work of programmes, circuits, pulses which functions merely to process and recycle the "events" produced (excreted) within itself. For Jameson (1983) there is the "schizophrenic" consumer disintegrating into a succession of unassimilable instants, condemned through the ubiquity and instantaneousness of commodified images and information to live forever in *chronos* (this then this then this) without having access to the (centring) sanctuary of *kairos* (cyclical, mythical, meaningful time). For Deleuze and Guattari there is the nomad drifting across "milles plateaux" drawn, to use their phrase, "like a schizophrenic taking a walk" (1977) from one arbitrary point of intensity to the next by the febrile and erratic rhythm of desire (conceived in this case against Lacan as the subversive Other to the Law not as its accomplice). In each case, a particular (end of) "subjectivity," a particular "subjective modality," a distinct, universal "structure of feeling" is posited alongside the diagnostic critique of the contemporary "condition." Just as Marshall Berman proposes that

modernisation (urbanisation, industrialisation, mechanisation) and modernism, the later answering wave of innovations in the arts together articulated a third term, the experience of modernity itself; so the prophets of the Post are suggesting that post-modernisation (automation, micro technologies, decline of manual labour and traditional work forms, consumerism, the rise of multinational media conglomerates, deregulation of the airwaves, etc.) together with postmodernism (bricolage, pastiche, allegory, the "hyperspace" of the new architecture) are serving to articulate the experience of the Post. Whereas the experience of modernity represented an undecidable mix of anticipated freedoms and lost certainties incorporating both the terror of disintegrating social and moral bonds, of spatial and temporal horizons and the prospect of an unprecedented mastery of nature, an emancipation from the very chains of natural scarcity—whereas, in other words, modernity was always a Janus faced affair—the experience of *post* modernity is positively schizogenic: a grotesque attenuation—possibly monstrous, occasionally joyous—of our capacity to feel and to respond. Post modernity is modernity without the hopes and dreams which made modernity bearable. It is a hydra-headed, decentred condition in which we get dragged along from pillow to Post across a succession of reflecting surfaces drawn by the call of the wild signifier. The implication is that when time and progress stop, at the moment when the clocks wind down, we get wound up. In Nietzsche's dread eternal Now, as the world stops turning (stroke of noon, stroke of midnight), we start spinning round instead. This at least, is the implication of the end of history argument: thus—Zarathustra-like—speak the prophets of the Post. In the dystopian extrapolation of schizophrenia as the emergent psychic norm of postmodernism we can hear perhaps, the bitter echo (back to front and upside down) of the two 68's: San Francisco (Jameson) and Paris (Baudrillard). The schizophrenic is no longer presented as the wounded hero/heroic victim of the modernising process ("Who poses the greater threat to society: the fighter pilot who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima or the schizophrenic who believes the bomb is inside his body?" [R.D. Laing]). The schizophrenic is no longer implicitly regarded as the suffering guarantor of threatened freedoms and of an imperilled ontic authenticity but rather as the desperate witness/impotent victim of the failure not only of marxism but also of the inflated libertarian claims, dreams and millenarian aspirations of the two 68's.

3. Against Utopia

Running parallel to the anti-teleological impulse, and in many ways, as is indicated above, serving as the inevitable complement to it, there is a strongly marked vein of skepticism concerning any collective destination, global framework of prediction, any claims to envisage, for instance, the "ultimate mastery of nature," the "rational control of social forms," a "perfect state of being," "end of all (oppressive) powers," etc. This anti-utopian theme is directed against all those programmes and solutions (most especially against marxism and fascism) which have recourse to a bogus scientificity, which place a high premium on centralised planning/social engineering, and which tend to rely heavily for their implementation on the maintenance of strict party discipline, a conviction of ideological certitude, etc. The barbaric excesses (e.g., Auschwitz, the Gulag) which are said to occur *automatically* when people attempt to put such solutions and programmes into action are seen to be licenced by reference to what Lyotard (1984) calls the "grands recits" of the West: by the blind faith in progress, evolution, race struggle, class struggle, etc., which is itself a product of the deep metaphysical residue which lies at the root of Western thought and culture. In other words (and here there is an explicit link with the nouvelles philosophes of the 1970's) all Holy Wars require casualties and infidels, all

utopias come wrapped in barbed wire. Many commentators have remarked upon both the banality and the irrefutability of these conclusions.

The image which is often invoked as a metaphor for the decline of utopian aspirations, the refusal of "progress" and the "progressive" ideologies which underpin it—an image which in a sense encompasses all three of the founding negations of postmodern thought—is Walter Benjamin's allegorical interpretation of Paul Klee's painting the *Angelus Novus*. Benjamin (1969) suggests that in this painting, the angel of history is depicted staring in horror at the "single catastrophe" which hurls "wreckage upon wreckage" at his feet as the storm which is blowing from Paradise propels him irresistibly "into the future to which his back is turned" (p. 257). "This storm," writes Benjamin, "is what we call progress." In a number of subtly and elaborately developed arguments evolved partly in the course of his protracted debate with Habermas over the nature of rationality and modernity, Lyotard (1984) has sought to clip the angel's wings by recommending that we abandon all those "modern" sciences which legitimate themselves by reference to a metadiscourse which makes an explicit appeal to "some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth" (p. xxiii).

In what becomes in effect an explicit renunciation of marxism (Lyotard was a founder member of the *Socialism or Barbarism* group in the 50's), Lyotard returns to Kant—especially to the critique of judgement—to reflect upon the origins of modern social thought, aesthetics and the relationship between the two. He sets out to examine the philosophical underpinnings of the Enlightenment project which is defined as a twofold impetus towards universalisation (Reason) and social engineering (Revolution), both of which find support and legitimacy in the related doctrines of progress, social planning and historical "necessity." Much of Lyotard's (1986b) argument turns on an involved discussion of the distinction in Kant (following Burke) between the two orders of aesthetic experience: the beautiful and the sublime. Whereas the beautiful in Kant consists in all those views, objects, sounds from which we derive aesthetic pleasure but which can be framed, contained, harmoniously assimilated, the sublime is reserved for all those phenomena which exceed logical containment and which elicit a mixture of both pleasure and terror in the viewer (Burke mentions, for instance, the spectacle of a stormy sea or a volcano).

Lyotard argues that insofar as the various modernist literary and artistic avant gardes attempt to "present the unrepresentable" (through abstraction, alienation, defamiliarisation, etc.) they remain firmly committed to an aesthetics of the sublime rather than the beautiful. For Lyotard, a properly avant garde poem or canvas takes us to this sublime point where consciousness and being bang up against their own limitations in the prospect of absolute otherness—God or infinity—in the prospect, that is, of their disappearance in death and silence. That encounter compels the spectator's, the reader's and the artist's subjectivities to be predicated for as long as it lasts in an unlivable tense: the post modern tense. Post modernity is here defined as a condition that is also a contradiction in terms. Lyotard calls this timeless tense the future anterior: "post" meaning "after," "modo" meaning "now." (What Lyotard calls "post modernity" is similar to Paul de Man's (1983) a(nti)historical definition of "modernity" as the perpetual present tense within which human beings have always lived at all times and in all places pinioned forever between a disintegrating, irrecoverable, half remembered past and an always uncertain future.) Lyotard insists on the validity and the viability of this avant garde project of the sublime and seeks to promote those artistic practices which pose the issue of the unrepresentable in a gesture which has to be

incessantly forgotten and repeated. Using a term from psychoanalytic theory, Lyotard calls this process "anamnesis": the re-encounter with a trauma or former experience of intensity through a process of recollection, utterance and invocation which involves not so much a recovery of the original experience as a re-capitulation of it.

What might at first seem a quite arbitrary, unnecessarily abstruse and idiosyncratic detour through 18th century German idealist aesthetics actually provides Lyotard with an opportunity to flesh out his central objections to Habermas's attempts to defend and build on the Enlightenment inheritance, to revive what Habermas regards as the prematurely arrested project of modernity.

For Lyotard uses the notion of the sublime as a kind of metaphor for the *absolute* nature of those limitations placed on what can be said, seen, shown, presented, demonstrated, put into play, put into practice, and Lyotard implies that each encounter with the sublime in art provides us with the single salutary lesson that complexity, difficulty, opacity are always there in the same place: *beyond our grasp*. The inference here in the insistence on the palpability of human limitation is politically nuanced at those points when Lyotard talks about the disastrous consequences which have flowed from all attempts to implement the "perfect (rational) system" or to create the "perfect society" during what he calls the "last two sanguinary centuries" (1986a, p. 6).

Habermas, publicly aligned with the Frankfurt tradition which he is concerned both to revise and to revive, has emphasised the emancipatory and utopian dimensions of art favouring an aesthetics of the beautiful. From this position, the fact that the harmonious integration of formal elements in an artwork gives us pleasure indicates that we are all drawn ineluctably by some internal logos (reason reflexively unfolding/folding back upon itself through the dispassionate contemplation of form), that we are, in other words, drawn towards the ideal resolution of conflict in the perfection of good form. Here our capacity both to produce and to appreciate the beautiful stands as a kind of "promissory note" for the eventual emancipation of humanity. Lyotard, on the other hand, in a move which mirrors the deconstructive strategies exemplified by Derrida, takes the relatively subordinate, residual term, the "sublime" in the binary coupling upon which "modern" (i.e., Enlightenment) aesthetics is based (the Beautiful—the sublime) where the sublime functions as that-which-is-aesthetic-but-not-beautiful and privileges it to such an extent that the whole edifice of Enlightenment thought and achievement is (supposedly) threatened. For whereas the idea of the beautiful contains within it the promise of an ideal, as yet unrealised community (to say "this is beautiful" is to assert the generalisability of aesthetic judgements and hence the possibility/ideal of consensus), the sublime in contrast, atomises the community by confronting each individual with the prospect of his or her imminent and solitary demise. In Lyotard's words, with the sublime, "everyone is alone when it comes to judging" (1986b, p. 11).

The sublime functions in Lyotard's work as a means of corroding the two "materialist" faiths (positivism and marxism) which characterise the superceded modern epoch. For example, responding recently to an attack on postmodernism by the British marxist, Terry Eagleton (1985), Lyotard (1986b) made the provocative (or facetious) claim that Marx "touches on the issue of the sublime" in the concept of the proletariat in that the proletariat is, in Kantian terms, an Idea in Reason, that is, an idea which must be seen as such, not as an empirically verifiable existent (i.e., the working class). The "proletariat," in other words, according to Lyotard, cannot be incarnated and specified as this or that group or class. It is not reducible to "experience" (Lyotard declines of course to specify how—given this distinction—marxism is to fulfill its claims to be a philosophy

of praxis...). Using Adorno's shorthand term to signal the litany of disasters which he sees underwriting the modern period, Lyotard (1986a) asserts that "Auschwitz" happened because people made precisely that category error from the time of Robespierre's Terror on, seeking to identify (more commonly to identify *themselves* with) such Ideas in Reason. A succession of revolutionary vanguards and tribunals have set themselves up as the subjects and agents of historical destiny: "I am Justice, Truth, the revolution...We are the proletariat. We are the incarnation of free humanity" (Lyotard, 1986b, p. 11)—and have thereby sought to render themselves unaccountable to the normative framework provided by the web of "first order narratives" in which popular thought, morality and social life is properly grounded. Those moments when men and women believed themselves to be Benjamin's Angel of History who "would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 257), moments of illusory Faustian omnipotence, and certainty are the dangerous moments of supposedly full knowledge, when people feel fully present to themselves and to their "destiny" (the moment, say, when the class in itself becomes a class for itself). For Lyotard they are the moments of historical disaster: they inaugurate the time of "revolutions," executions, concentration camps. In an ironic retention of Kant's separation of the spheres of morality, science and art (ironic in view of Lyotard's judgement of the Enlightenment legacy), he seeks to stake out the sublime as the legitimate province of (post)modern art and aesthetics whilst at the same time rigorously excluding as illegitimate and "paranoid" any aspiration to "present the unrepresentable" through politics (i.e., to "change the world") or to constitute an *ontology* of the sublime (i.e., "permanent revolution," attempts to create a new moral or social order, etc.). The sublime remains "das Unform" (Lyotard, 1986b, p. 11), that which is without form hence that which is monstrous and unthinkable and rather than seeking to embody universal values of Truth, Justice and Right finding the licence for such pretensions in the great metanarratives ("the pursuit of freedom or happiness" (p. 10)), Lyotard recommends that we should instead think of the human project in terms of "the infinite task of complexification" (p. 10). ("Maybe our task is just that of complexifying the complexity we are in charge of.") This "obscure desire towards extra sophistication" (p. 10) effectively functions within Lyotard's most recent work as a panglobal, transhistorical imperative assuming at times an almost metaphysical status (although he does make a concession to the persistence of scarcity in the Third World in the cryptic division of humanity into two (unequal) halves one of which (i.e., ours?) is devoted to the task of complexification, the other (theirs?) to the "terrible, ancient task of survival" (!) (1986a, p. 12)). Lyotard may have jettisoned the socialism which formed his preferred option in the stark choice which he felt was facing the world in the 50's (S or B) but he remains alert to the threat of barbarism which he now associates with a refusal to acknowledge and/or contribute to this eternal complexifying mission ("The claim for simplicity, in general, appears today that of the barbarian," [Lyotard, 1986a, p. 6]).

Lyotard offers perhaps one of the most direct, most intricately argued critiques of the utopian impetus within modern, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought but there are within the Gallic version of the Post other variations on the (Nietzschean) theme of the end of the Western philosophical tradition (Lyotard ends by dissolving dialectics into paradoxology, and language games). In some ways, those discourses from Foucault to Derrida, from the Barthes of the *Tel Quel* phase to the Jacques Lacan of *L'Ecrits* might be said to be posited following Nietzsche on the No Man's land (the gender here is marked!) staked out between the two meanings of the word "subject" mentioned earlier (see

section 1)—a No Man's land which is just that: a land owned by nobody in the space between the enonce and the enunciation where questions of agency, cause, intention, authorship, history become irrelevant. All those questions dissolve into a sublime, asocial Now which is differently dimensionalised in different accounts. For Derrida in grammatology that space is called "aporia"—the unpassable path—the moment when the self-contradictory nature of human discourse stands exposed. For Foucault, it is the endless recursive spirals of power and knowledge: the total, timeless space he creates around the hellish figure of the Panopticon: the viewing tower at the centre of the prison yard—the "voir" in savoir/pouvoir, the looking in knowing. For *Tel Quel* it is the moment of what Julia Kristeva calls "significance": the unravelling of the subject in the pleasure of the text, the point where the subject disintegrates, moved beyond words by the materiality, productivity and slippage of the signifier over the signified. And for Lacan, it is the Real—that which remains unsayable and hence unbearable—the (boundless, inconceivable) space outside language and the Law, beyond the binaries of the Imaginary register: the Real being the realm of the promise/threat of our eventual (unthinkable) disintegration, our absorption into flux. The sublime is here installed in each case as the place of epiphany and terror, the place of the ineffable which stands over and against all human endeavour, including the project of intellectual totalisation itself. Lacan's Real, Foucault's power-knowledge spirals, Kristeva's significance, Derrida's aporia, Barthes' text of bliss: all are equivalent, in some senses reducible to Lyotard's category of the sublime. This elevation of the sublime (which has its more literal (or crass) quasi-empirical corollary in the cult of schizophrenia (see above)—the cult, that is, of dread, of the sublime mode of being in the world) could be interpreted as an extension of the aspiration towards the ineffable which has impelled the European avant garde at least since the Symbolists and Decadents and probably since the inception in the 1840's of metropolitan literary and artistic modernism with the "anti-bourgeois" refusals of Baudelaire. It implies a withdrawal from the immediately given ground of sociality by problematising language as tool and language as communicative medium, by substituting models of signification, discourse and de-centred subjectivity for these older humanist paradigms and by emphasising the impossibility (of "communication," transcendence, dialectic, the determination of origins and outcomes, the fixing or stabilisation of values and meanings, etc.). The moment which is privileged is the solitary confrontation with the irreducible fact of limitation, Otherness, differance, with the question variously of the loss of mastery, "death in life" (Lyotard), of the "frequent little deaths" or "picknoleptic interruptions" of consciousness by the unconscious (Virilio), etc.

The conversion of asociality into an absolute value can accommodate a variety of more or less resigned postures: skepticism (Derrida), stoicism (Lyotard, Lacan, Foucault), libertarian anarchism/mysticism (Kristeva), hedonism (Barthes), cynicism/nihilism (Baudrillard). However such a privileging of the sublime tends to militate against the identification of larger (collective) interests (the isms of the modern epoch, e.g., marxism, liberalism, etc.). It does this by undermining or dismissing as simplistic/ "barbaric" what Richard Rorty has called "our untheoretical sense of social solidarity" (1984, p. 41), and by bankrupting the liberal investment in the belief in the capacity of human beings to empathise with each other, to reconcile opposing "viewpoints," to seek the fight-free integration of conflicting interest groups. There is no room in the split opened up in the subject by the Post for the cultivation of "consensus" or for the growth and maintenance of a "communicative community," no feasible ascent towards an "ideal speech situation" (Habermas). The stress on the asocial further

erodes the sense of destination and purposive struggle supplied by the "optimistic will" (Gramsci), and the theoretical means to recover (i.e., emancipate) a "reality" obscured by "something called 'ideology' (created by power) in the name of something called 'validity' (not created by power)" (Rorty, 1984, p. 41) (Habermas again). The stress on the impossible tends in other words, to seriously limit the scope and definition of the political (where politics is defined as the "art of the possible"). A series of elisions tend to prescribe a definite route here (though it is a route taken by more disciples than master-mistresses). First there is the absolute conflation of a number of relatively distinct structures, paradigms, tendencies: the emergence of industrial-military complexes, the Enlightenment aspiration to liberate humanity, the bourgeoisie, the rise of the modern "scientific" episteme, the bureaucratic nation-state and "Auschwitz." Next these discrete and non-synchronous historical developments are traced back to the model of the subject secreted at the origins of Western thought and culture in transcendental philosophy. Finally an ending is declared to the "tradition" thus established and the equation is made between this ending (the end of Philosophy) and the ending of History itself.

As Rorty has pointed out--and these concluding remarks on anti-utopianism are a precis of Rorty's arguments--such a trajectory overestimates the wider historical importance of the philosophical tradition and especially overestimates the extent to which modern social, economic and political structures were underwritten by (i.e., required) models of subjectivity "originating" in the context of philosophical debates on the nature of consciousness, perception, alienation, freedom, language, etc. In this way, the Post tends to reproduce back to front as it were like a photographic negative, the mistake which Habermas himself makes of linking the story of modern post-Kantian philosophy and rationalism too closely to that other modern story: the rise of industrialised democratic societies. Rorty suggests that the second story has more to do with pressures and social movements external to the academy, that the idea(l) of the "communicative community" has been established through "things like the formation of trade unions, the meritocratisation of education, the expansion of the franchise, and cheap newspapers" rather than through the abstract discussion of epistemology, that religion declines in influence not because of Nietzsche, Darwin, positivism or whatever but because "one's sense of relation to a power beyond the community becomes less important as you see yourself as part of a body of public opinion, capable of making a difference to the public fate" (Rorty, 1984, p. 38). Viewed in this light, the history of philosophy from, say, Descartes to Nietzsche is seen as a "distraction from the history of concrete social engineering which made the contemporary North Atlantic culture what it is now (with all its faults and virtues)," and Rorty concludes by sketching the outlines of an alternative philosophical canon in which the "greatness" of a "Great Mind" would be measured less by reference to her/his contribution to the dialectics of the "Great Debates," and by the epistemological complexity of the arguments put forward than by his/her sensitivity to "new social and religious and institutional possibilities"—a prescient and strategic orientation which renders questions of "grounding" and "legitimation" irrelevant. Within such a transformed knowledge-practice field, the function of analysis would be neither to unmask ideology, to assist the forward march of Reason nor to trace out the eternal perimeters of sociality, knowledge and the sayable but rather, following Foucault, to explain "who was currently getting and using power and for what purposes and then (unlike Foucault) to suggest how some other people might get it and use it for other purposes" (Rorty, 1984, p. 42).

Gramsci and Articulation

Such an orientation would seem to require that same combination of qualities, that same mix of conjunctural analysis and strategic intervention which typifies the Gramscian approach—(especially as developed by people like Stuart Hall and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), [albeit, as Hall himself points out, along rather different lines])—where a "war of position" is waged between conflicting alliances of "dominant" and "subaltern" class fractions over and within a heterogeneous range of sites which are themselves shaped by a complex play of discursive and extra-discursive factors and forces. But what distinguishes the Gramscian approach is the way in which it requires us to negotiate and engage with the multiple axes of both power and the popular and to acknowledge the ways in which these two axes are "mutually articulated" through a range of populist discourses which centre by and large precisely on those pre-Post-erous "modern" categories: the "nation," "roots," the "national past," "heritage," "the rights of the individual" (variously) "to life and liberty," "to work," "to own property," "to expect a better future for his or her children," the right "to be an individual": the "right to choose." To engage with the popular as constructed and as lived—to negotiate this bumpy and intractable terrain—we are forced at once to desert the perfection of a purely theoretical analysis, of a "negative dialectic" (Adorno) in favour of a more "sensuous (and strategic) logic" (Gramsci)—a logic attuned to the living textures of popular culture, to the ebb and flow of popular debate.

In this shift in the critical focus, the meaning of the phrase "legitimation crisis" is inflected right away from problems of epistemology directly on to the political, as our attention is drawn to the *processes* whereby particular power blocs seek to impose their moral leadership on the masses and to legitimate their authority through the construction (rather than the realisation) of consensus. The Gramscian model demands that we grasp these processes not because we want to expose them or to understand them in the abstract but because we want to *use* them to *effectively* contest that authority and leadership by offering arguments and alternatives that are not only "correct" ("right on") but convincing and convincingly presented, arguments that capture the popular imagination, that engage directly with the issues, problems, anxieties, dreams and hopes of real (i.e., actually existing) men and women: arguments, in other words, that take the popular (and hence the populace) seriously *on its own terms*.

At the same time, the Gramscian line is identified, at least in Britain, with a commitment to flexible strategies, to responsive, accountable power structures, with a commitment to decentralisation and local democracy. It is associated with a challenge to the workerism and masculinism of the old Labour left, a move away from the dogmatism which can still plague the fringe parties, with a sensitivity to local and regional issues, with an alertness, too, to race and gender as well as class as significant axes of power. It is associated with a commitment to "advance along multiple fronts," with the kinds of radical policy implemented by those progressive enclaves within the local State (e.g., sponsorship for feminist, gay rights, ethnic minority; citizens' rights; health care and support groups; Police Monitoring committees; small, alternative presses; alternative arts programmes; cheap public transport; expanded public information services and issue oriented "consciousness raising" (e.g., anti-nuclear power) publicity campaigns; popular festivals, etc.)—policies which so provoked the Thatcher administration that during this last Parliamentary session they dismantled the system of local municipal government in the big urban centres run throughout the 80's by Labour administrations (leaving London as the only major Western European capital without its own elected council).

The commitment on the one hand to local radicalism, to a menu of bold, experimental policies for the inner city and on the other, the critique of Thatcherite "authoritarian populism" (Hall, 1980a) and the resolve to engage for instance on the traditional rightist ground of "national-popular" discourses represent perhaps the two dominant and potentially opposed tendencies which derive in part from debates amongst the British Left on the relatively recently translated work of Gramsci (1985). However, while the first tendency clearly resonates with many of the (more positive) themes of the Post (68) debates, the stress on populism seems to run directly counter to the drift of the Post. For the popular exists solely in and through the problematic "we"—the denigrated mode of address, the obsolescent shifter. This "we" is the imaginary community which remains unspeakable within the Post—literally unspeakable in Baudrillard who presents the myth of the masses as a "black hole" drawing all meaning to its non-existent centre (1983a). In Gramsci, of course, the "we" is neither "fatal" in the Baudrillardian sense, nor given, pre-existent, "out there" in the pre-Post-erous sense. Instead it is itself the site of struggle. The "we" in Gramsci has to be *made* and re-made, actively articulated in the double sense that Stuart Hall refers to in the interview: both "spoken," "uttered" and "linked with," "combined." (It has to be at once "positioned" *and* brought into being). The term "articulation" is thus a key bridging concept between two distinct paradigms or problematics. It bridges the "structuralist" and the "culturalist" paradigms which Hall (1980b) has identified and since the late 60's sought to integrate in that it both acknowledges the constitutive role played by (ideological!) discourses in the shaping of (historical) subjectivities and at the same time it insists that there is somewhere outside "discourse" (a world where groups and classes differentiated by conflicting interests, cultures, goals, aspirations; by the positions they occupy in various hierarchies are working in and on dynamic (i.e., changing) power structures)—a world which has in turn *to be linked with*, shaped, acted upon, struggled over, intervened in: changed. In other words, the concept of "articulation" itself articulates the two paradigms by linking together and expressing the double emphasis which characterises Gramscian cultural studies. It performs the same metonymic function, is as homologous to and as exemplary of Stuart Hall's project as "differance" is to Derrida's (where the term differance simultaneously connotes and itself *enacts* the double process of differing and deferring meaning which Derrida sees as language's essential operation). The reliance on the concept of articulation suggests that the "social" in Gramsci is neither a "beautiful" dream nor a dangerous abstraction, neither a contract made and re-made on the ground as it were, by the members of a "communicative community" in multiple face-to-face interactions which are "context-dependent" (Habermas) nor an empirically non-existent "Idea in Reason" which bears no relation whatsoever to experience (Lyotard). It is instead a continually shifting, mediated relation between groups and classes, a structured field and a set of lived relations in which complex ideological formations composed of elements derived from diverse sources have to be actively combined, dismantled, bricolaged so that new politically effective alliances can be secured between different fractional groupings which can themselves no longer be returned to static, homogenous classes. In other words, we can't collapse the social into speech act theory or subsume its contradictory dynamics underneath the impossible quest for universal validity claims. At the same time, rather than dispensing with the "claim for simplicity" by equating it with barbarism, we might do better to begin by distinguishing a claim from a demand, and by acknowledging that a *demand* for simplicity exists, that such a demand has to be negotiated, that it is neither essentially noble nor barbaric, that

it is, however, *complexly articulated* with different ideological fragments and social forces in the form of a range of competing populisms.

It would be foolish to present a polar opposition between the Gramscian line(s) and the (heterogeneous) Posts. There is too much shared historical and intellectual ground for such a partition to serve any valid purpose. It was, after all, the generation of marxist intellectuals who lived through 68 and who took the events in Paris and the West Coast seriously who turned in the 70's to Gramsci. In addition, there are clear cross-Channel links between the two sets of concerns and emphases, for instance, in the work of Michel Pecheux (1982) on "interdiscourse." The retention of the old marxist terms should not be allowed to obscure the extent to which many of these terms have been transformed—wrenched away from the "scientific" mooring constructed in the Althusserian phase. What looks at first glance a lot like the old "rationalist" dualism ("Left" v. "Right," etc.); the old "modernising" teleology ("progressive," "reactionary," "emergent," "residual," etc.); a typically "modernist" penchant for military metaphors ("dominant" and "subaltern classes," etc.); an unreconstructed "modernist" epistemology ("ideology," for instance, rather than "discourse") looks different closer to. From the perspectives heavily influenced by the Gramscian approach, nothing is anchored to the "grands recits," to master narratives, to stable (positive) identities, to fixed and certain meanings: all social and semantic relations are contestable hence mutable: everything appears to be in flux: there are no predictable outcomes. Though classes still exist, there is no guaranteed dynamic to class struggle and no "class belonging": there are no solid homes to return to, no places reserved in advance for the righteous. No one "owns" an "ideology" because ideologies are themselves in process: in a state of constant formation and reformation. In the same way, the concept of hegemony remains distinct from the Frankfurt model of a "total closure of discourse" (Marcuse) and from the ascription of total class domination which is implied in the Althusserian model of a contradictory social formation held in check eternally (at least until "the last (ruptural) instance") by the work of the RSA's and the ISA's. Instead hegemony is a precarious, "moving equilibrium" (Gramsci) achieved through the orchestration of conflicting and competing forces by more or less unstable, more or less temporary alliances of class fractions.

Within this model, there is no "science" to be opposed to the monolith of ideology, only prescience: an alertness to possibility and emergence—that and the always imperfect, risky, undecidable "science" of strategy. There are only competing ideologies themselves unstable constellations liable to collapse at any moment into their component parts. These parts in turn can be recombined with other elements from other ideological formations to form fragile unities which in turn act to interpellate and bond together new imaginary communities, to forge fresh alliances between disparate social groups (see, for instance, Hall (1980a, 1985) and others (Jessop et al., 1984) on "national popular" discourses).

But it would be equally foolish to deny that there are crucial differences between the two sets of orientations. A marxism of whatever kind could never move back from or go beyond "modernity" in the very general terms in which it is defined within the Post, which is not to say that marxism is necessarily bound to a "dynamic" and destructive model of technological "advance" (see Bahro (1984) on the possibility of eco-marxism: a union of "greens" and "reds"). However it should be said that the kind of marxism Stuart Hall proposes bears little or no relation to the caricatured, teleological *religion* of marxism which—legitimately in my view—is pilloried by the Post. A marxism without guarantees is a marxism which has suffered a sea change. It is a marxism which has "gone under" in a succession of tempests that include the smoke and fire of

1968 and the shrinkage of imaginative horizons in the monetarist "new realism" of the 80's and yet it is a marxism that has survived, returning perhaps a little lighter on its feet, (staggering at first), a marxism more prone perhaps to listen, learn, adapt and to appreciate, for instance, that words like "emergency" and "struggle" don't just mean fight, conflict, war and death but birthing, the prospect of new life emerging: a struggling to the light....

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Editor's note: A version of this article will appear in Dick Hebdige's forthcoming book, Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things, London: Comedia.